



Mystery of the Lost Golf Balls Solved and a Wonderful Garden Discovered by a Dirty Boy

ONCE there was a small boy named Gideon Truman. I say "once" not because he is dead or because it all happened long ago, but just because that's the proper way to begin a story of elves. Gid was a poor boy whose clothes were patched and faded; but, besides that, he was a dirty boy.

He wouldn't wash his neck mornings nor clean his finger-nails, and when he thought of taking a bath he shivered all over; but he would go in swimming four times a day when it was warm enough. Gid said he couldn't see the use of bathing.

His poor mother had a dreadful time with him trying to keep him clean enough to be recognized, and she didn't always succeed, either, for there were times when she passed him on the street without knowing he was her son, so dirty was his face!

She lived just on the outskirts of Milltown, in a little cottage that was so old and storm-beaten that its weatherboards were as gray as the trunk of an old, dead tree, but she was always as neat as a new pin, and, therefore, she felt a deep pain at the thought of having a son who was called "Dirty Gid" by his own companions.

In vain she reasoned with him and tried to show him how much happier he would be with clean neck, ears and hands. Gid couldn't see it, and when she scrubbed him with sand-soap he writhed and groaned as if he were being tortured by Indians! My, how he hated soap!

Of course, if you wish, I will tell you what had made him so averse to washing, but I don't think many people will credit this explanation. It was merely because, when he was little, his fond mother

dearly a white golf ball whizzed past his ear, and looking up he saw it cut through the bushes behind him.

When the boy and the player came hunting for it he did not help or even tell them where it had gone, so mad was he, but when they gave it up in disgust he soon found the little ball and sat down again, resolved to hold it for ransom, as the club paid ten cents each for balls found on the links.

It was shady and cool among the thorny bushes, and he rested his back against a tall, flat stone and after a time he dozed. The ball slipped from his hand and rolled away in the thin grass. When he opened his eyes he almost jumped out of his skin, for there before him stood three tiny men, one of whom was holding the golf ball in his arms, as a boy might hold a watermelon, and the three were disputing as to whom it belonged.

"I tell you," said one, in a thin voice, "I tell you, I saw it first and was making for it when the garter snake came toward me, so it's mine!"

"Tut, tut, and also, fudge, likewise bosh!" cried another in a deep growl, "I saw it roll from the

"Never mind. We will find out some way to feed him. No doubt in the experimental fields we will find things that mortals may eat, and surely that will be the best way to find out how those experiments have succeeded," said a very ancient elf,



"That Explains Where All the Lost Balls Have Gone!" He Exclaimed.



used to wash him just as if she were scrubbing the front stoop.

It seemed to Gid that his skin was simply being rubbed off in layers when she got at him with soap and stiff brush, and sometimes he used to wonder why she didn't boil him as she did the clothes in the Monday washing.

He had known only once what it was to be gently handled, and that was when Miss Gurney washed his hands and face one day when he had been hit by a stone and had fainted. He never forgot the feel of the smooth, soft hands that gently laved his forehead with warm water and scented soap. He thrilled more than once when he recalled the tender pressure of her fingers upon his blackened hands, and he wondered why his mother, who loved him dearly, couldn't use the same method of washing boys.

Well, this story tells you how he was cured of being dirty.

Gid sometimes acted as "caddy" for the golf players upon the Wee Highball Links. A "caddy" is a boy who carries a leather bag of "sticks," "putters," "drivers," "cleats," "clinkers," "spuds," "fizzlers," and "marlin-spikes," which are the different names, I understand, for the shiny-sticks used in the game.

Besides this, the caddy hunts for lost balls and instructs the green players. Gid used to get a quarter of a dollar for a half day of this sort of thing, and he was very fond of the work. I think it safe to assert that no boy on the Wee Highball Links was quicker at finding stray balls than Gid, but he was often enraged at hearing remarks made about the grimy condition of his face and hands.

Many a fastidious player refused his services, especially beginners with brand-new yellow leather tool-bags, who didn't wish to see finger marks on them. Yet he never once thought of appearing in the village, that of a clean boy with shining face.

So, after a time, when most of the boys in the village came to know of the money-making chances at the links, Gid was obliged to sit idly by and see them chosen instead of himself, although a small number of the players still preferred the dirty boy who was so sure to find all lost balls. Yet this number was indeed so small that he rarely was employed, and he used to grit his teeth as he lay in the grass watching the lucky lads who were earning quarters and slyly laughing at "Dirty Gid" for missing all these good chances.

One day Mr. Britton, the eminent publisher, who was a nice, chunky man with a kind face, and who was the most expert player in the Wee Highball Links, advised Gid to go home and hold his head under the faucet for a half-hour. Coming from an old friend, this hurt the boy more than all the gibes of his companions or his mother's pleadings, and he walked away with quivering lips.

"Why is everybody so stuck on being clean?" he asked himself, as he looked at his grimy knuckles. "I feel just as good when I'm dirty! I can't see what difference it makes as long as I like it. It's just the same as some people liking to wear black clothes instead of white clothes, seems to me!"

He stole away and hid in a thick copse of thorny bushes which had never been cut down, and here he gave way to bitter tears that furrowed runs down his cheeks until he resembled a painted Indian. Sud-

boy's hand and was merely waiting until he snored, when I was going to make way with it! So, by all rights, it is mine!"

"You may dispute all day, you two," said the one who held the ball, an elf with a beard that touched the ground. "I got it, I have it and I'm going to keep it, and that's my argument!"

"But you already have eleven and I have only six!" shouted the first elf. "It's not fair, and I protest!"

"Protest all you please, but that won't give you the ball!" replied the bearded one. "I need all I can get!"

"Dog gone if that don't explain where all the lost balls have got to!" exclaimed Gid aloud, as he suddenly sat up straight against the rock.

The elves leaped into the air in surprise, for they all thought he was sound asleep.

"What do you do with those balls?" asked the boy, before they had recovered.

"Make punch bowls of them!" replied the bearded elf, after a pause. "We cut them in half."

"I'd like to taste some of that punch!" said Gid. "It must be pretty fine!"

"Permit me to offer you some," the bearded elf said, as he produced a tiny flask and held it toward Gid.

"You may have it all. There's plenty more down below."

Gid merely meant to taste the strange stuff, but it all slipped down his throat before he knew it, and it tasted like blackberries. Suddenly he remembered Rip Van Winkle, and how he had slept for twenty years after drinking with the little men of the mountain, and he shivered, for he felt that something was happening to him already.

Queer tickling, shooting thrills ran up his legs and arms, and his eyes grew blurred and then everything faded away!

When he came to his senses he found himself being drawn along through complete darkness, and with his arms bound so that he could not move them. That he was going downward was very apparent from the slant of his body, but where he was going he could get no idea.

After a space he was able to see that he was approaching a light of some sort, and soon he saw that he was being hurried along a sort of narrow tunnel not much larger than his body and toward an opening, but when he reached what he supposed was the opening it turned out to be a larger space, a sort of elfin hall, illuminated from above by a faint, starry light which showed that he was surrounded by dozens of the little men.

He could see that his arms were tied with ropes made of grass. The elves gathered about him, eagerly examining him and showing great excitement.

"What are you going to do with him?" asked one of them.

"We will find a use for him!" replied one of his captors, laughing. "It's a long time since we had a mortal slave, you remember!"

"It is, indeed! It must be several hundred years!" "We have a slave. Hurrah!" shouted all of them, and they danced about in glee.

"But we'll have to feed him! He must eat, remember!" suddenly spoke up one of the older elves. "I recollect how we did it ages ago, when we caught the son of the miller!"

"It kept us busy stealing bread and fruit all the time!" exclaimed another, "and I think it was scarcely worth while!"

dressed in red leather. "We don't know yet what is the use of all Hieromathus has done."

"But see how dirty he is!" shouted another elf. "We can't have such a soiled creature about us!"

"That's easily remedied!" replied one of his captors. "He must be cleaned."

"But how do you clean people?" asked a tiny being no taller than one's hand. "I understand they wash themselves in water, these humans! We can't touch water!"

"No! Oh, no! indeed!" chorused all of them, shuddering.

"There's more ways of killing a cat than by choking it with butter!" responded the old elf. "We will beat him like a carpet and get most of the dirt off that way!"

"Fine! Splendid idea!" shouted the crowd of elves, and they hurried away for rods with which to beat the boy. Soon these arrived, and in a twinkling they began to belabor the dirty Gid on all sides, making the dirt fly in such clouds that they were all almost choked. At first Gid laughed, but after a time these tiny rods began to hurt, and soon he was in torment as they rose and fell as steady as rain.

Finally he began to yell in his agony, but that made not the slightest difference to his tormentors; they kept right on as if he were perfectly silent, until at last when he seemed to burn and tingle from head to foot, they stopped and the chief elf said:

"There! He's about as clean as any of us, I suppose. Now loosen his bonds and let him sit up!"

Gid could scarcely lift himself, but at last he sat up and said:

"That's a mean trick! I never did you any harm!"

"None of your impudence!" shouted the chief. "We will now take you to our king and see what he has to say. And mind, no back talk, or such things will happen to you that will make you think that beating was mere play!"

Gid, of course, had all sorts of ideas about elves, and principally was possessed of a notion that they could accomplish anything they wished just by uttering some magic word; and, therefore, he resolved to say nothing, but by patience and good nature try to gain their good will; so when he was told to rise and follow them to the king he obeyed in silence.

His back ached and his face seemed quite raw when he touched it, but he marched along a passage, now bending almost double to avoid scraping his sore back against the roof, and now walking erect where the passage was lofty enough, until, at last, they reached a tall-domed vault where, on a crystal throne, sat the elf king with a white beard ten feet long.

"Ha! At last!" said the monarch when the boy stood before him. "I now have another slave! This is a great comfort!"

"But what will your majesty do with him?" inquired a misshapen creature beside the king's footstool. "You have no use for a slave like that!"

"We will give him employment!" spoke up another elf, who bore a red wand. "He can be kept busy lopping off the roots that are growing down into the gold room, and that will be well worth the trouble, for they are pestering us very much, as they are too high to reach easily!"

"Good! Set him to work at once!" cried the king, much relieved. So Gid was conducted to the gold room, where the elves had stored such an amount of that precious metal that it dazzled Gid's eyes to look at it even in the dim light that seemed to gleam through the walls.

Here he was given a knife and he went to work lopping off the roots that penetrated the roof of the cavern. After he had removed all of them he was led to another cavern, where some mouthy bread was handed to him. He protested.

"Say, look here! I can't eat this stuff, you know!" said he. "Can't you get me some fresh bread?"

"That's all we could find!" responded one of the guards. "What's the matter with it?"

"It's mouldy, that's what! You're a fine bunch of elves if that's the best you can do with all your magic and charms!"

"Let's take him to old Hieromathus's experimental farm!" suggested the court fool. "It has never been of any use to anybody since he stopped playing at gardening like any mortal!"

"We will do just that!" cried the king. "I am positive that there are many things there that mortals eat."

So Gid was conducted to a great, wide hall, lighted apparently by a sort of electric light that was as strong as sunshine, only it came from beneath instead of above, and there he saw that the floor and even the walls were green with plants and foliage of all sorts. Here he recognized berries, fruits and vegetables growing.

"You may help yourself to anything you wish here," said one of the elves. "I know not just how these things are to be eaten, but you must find out for yourself. Everything here is just as Hieromathus left it, after spending ages in experimenting with the things that grow above ground."

The elves left Gid here, and he began to examine the strange underground garden with great interest, which soon changed to astonishment when he discovered its many wonders. First he found that the cucumbers that grew there in profusion were actually pickles! It was only by eating several that he convinced himself that this was so, and then he went further to find that there was cooked asparagus and pie-plant sticking up out of the ground! While he was tasting these an aged elf appeared beside him, an elf who was quivering with eagerness and who instantly cried:

"Ha! You are eating my stuff! It is all right? Have I succeeded?"

"What do you mean?" asked Gid, with a mouth full of rhubarb.

"I am the elf Hieromathus, and I am the one who made all these experiments, but I have never had a chance to test them, as we never eat. Here you will find all manner of new ideas in vegetation, all invented by myself, and I do hope you will say that I have succeeded!"

"As far as I've gone it's great!" replied Gid. "Do you mean to say that you can really make cooked things grow?"

"Assuredly! They will grow in this soil all right, but are they tasty and edible, that's the question?" replied Hieromathus, eagerly.

"See!" he added. "Here's an ear of sweet corn!" Gid tasted the hot corn, to find it perfect, although just torn from the stalk.

"Good! This is a great idea, and it will revolutionize the gardening business!"

"That's what I have claimed, but they laughed at me!" shouted the elf. "I said the mortals would never hate us again if we could benefit them in some such manner!"

"But mortals don't hate elves!" said Gid. "On the contrary, we regard them with the very kindest feelings."

"I will tell the king that you said so, but let me show you some more of my inventions. Here's an oyster plant, which, as you know, on earth merely tastes something like an oyster, perhaps, but under my careful direction it grows, raw, fried, steamed or roast oysters themselves. Taste one, please!"

Gid was astonished to find the elf was right. The oyster which he plucked from a stalk was exactly like a fresh bivalve, and when he had tasted fried and roast oysters he danced with glee, as did the elf also. Then he ate some fried potatoes that grew just like leaves, beneath which hung the boiled potatoes in clusters, smoking hot, and then some baked beans.

Cooked mushrooms covered the soil beneath the steaming onion and cabbage plants, which gave forth a strong odor that made him homesick, suggesting, as it did, corned beef and cabbage. Salads grew already dressed; lettuce, chicory, dandelion, each with

its own flavor, as if prepared by a finished cook, and Gid was compelled to admire the old elf's splendid skill.

"The spinach gave me the most trouble!" said the elf. "It seemed as though I'd never get it right, but I did. And I had a little difficulty with the cauliflower, but just look at that prepared horse-radish, and my catsup plants!"

The catsup came in tiny cuplike flowers or pitcher-plants, and was delicious, indeed, but what would you say to a plant that was filled with real custard? That was shown next to the astonished Gid, and he almost shouted with delight as he tasted it. Then Hieromathus revealed further wonders. Here was a bush filled with hot crullers, there a pretzel plant and yonder a small tree covered with gum drops!

"Everything that naturally comes from a vegetable can be grown here perfectly, I have learned," said the wise old elf. "Now here you see how I have improved upon nature and perfected a greater growth. This I consider my greatest triumph!"

"Here we have the animal and the vegetable kingdom combined in one. This is the common milk-weed, but instead of a nasty white juice, that is only used to cure warts, it gives a flow of real milk! Pray taste it!"

Gid did so, and was surprised to find that it was indeed genuine milk.

"Why, our fortune is made!" he cried, forgetting that he was a prisoner.

"Really, do you think so?" whispered Hieromathus, eagerly. "Will the mortals welcome my discoveries?"

"In a minute!" cried Gid. "Just show me how to get out of here with some samples of these things, and we can have anything we ask!"

"That's easy enough!" replied the elf. "We are now immediately under the garden of Widow Truman."

"Well, it will be little trouble to make an opening here above us and thus go forth."

"But the elves will attack me!" exclaimed the boy. "Pshaw! They're quite harmless!"

"Why, there's enough of them to overcome me easily!" said Gid.

"Not if you wet yourself. They dare not touch water, for they fear it will harm them, which is an elfin delusion, as I've proved it when watering these plants. Water hurts nobody!"

"If there's any water near here I'd like some to drink, and to wash myself, too, as I am covered with dust and cobwebs from your plants and things!" said Gid.

"Follow me!" said Hieromathus, and he led him to two clear springs, one warm and the other cold. Here Gid drank and then bathed, much to his relief, wondering, as he did so, why he had never appreciated a bath before. Then he heard a distant noise and started up as Hieromathus cried:

"Wet your clothes and stand by to protect me! They are angry at us!"

Sure enough, there they were, and they came fuming to the pools, when Gid shook drops of water at them they fled trembling, and when he pursued them back to the king's hall they all hurried bowed before him and surrendered.

The king offered him heaps of gold if he would leave, but Gid made a long speech in which he showed the elfin monarch all the advantages of being friendly with the people of the upper earth, and so they all went to work to dig a tunnel up to his mother's garden.

There he planted the seeds of the wonderful plants raised by Hieromathus, and with the aid of the elf Gid produced all manner of cooked vegetables, greatly benefiting mankind, as well as enriching himself immensely, but the greatest benefit was in the fact that the elves were rendered useful to others beside themselves.

It was no small matter, of course, to grow pumpkins, seasoned and cooked ready for the pie, or egg plants, sliced and fried, but to have the good will of the elves is, I think, far more important, although I don't believe, as many do, that these little underground people ever steal our babies and substitute their own. This, I am quite sure, is a fable invented by those people of ancient times, who ignorantly persecuted and tormented all elves because they feared and hated them.

Hieromathus, who lives with Gid now and always laughs when Gid goes into the bath room every morning, tells me that the elves have always been the most timid and peaceful creatures on earth, and I believe him; yet I still think some magic must have been used to change "Dirty Gid" into the clean and sly-faced boy whom I see driving about or playing golf on the Wee Highball Links every day.

WALT McDUGALL.